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## Jumpstarting a project through internal collaboration

Improving access  
to library collections



EDUCAUSE Southwest Regional Conference, February 21, 2007

Welcome to “Jumpstarting a project through internal collaboration.”

We’ll be talking today about how the University of Kansas relies on internal partnerships to improve access to library collections -

And in the case we’re discussing this afternoon, how we used such a collaboration to increase access to manuscript collections by digitizing finding aids.

- Holly Mercer – Coordinator of Digital Content Development
- Sarah Goodwin Thiel – Digital Imaging Librarian

## KU Digital Initiatives Program

Responsible for designing and implementing digital services needed to create, display, discover, store, and preserve scholarly information in a digital format.



Holly Mercer - Coordinator of Digital Content Development  
Sarah Goodwin Thiel - Digital Imaging Librarian.

We both work in a program at KU called Digital Initiatives, or DI. DI itself is a collaborative effort. It draws staff from both the KU Libraries and the Information Technology Department.

DI is responsible for designing and implementing the services necessary to make scholarly information accessible in a digital format.

- Libraries
- Information Technology

## KU Information Services

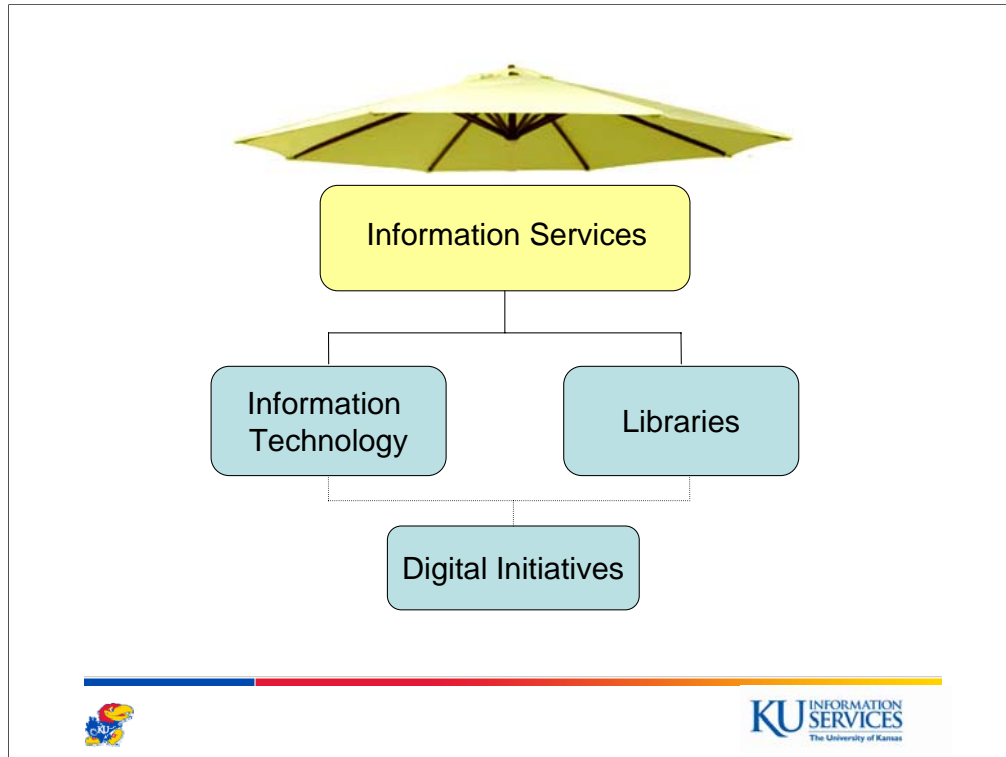
Guides the University's development and creative uses of information services and technology to help KU achieve its three-pronged mission of research, teaching and service.



The DI team is made up of staff from both the Libraries and Information Technology – Holly and I are both librarians and report to the Dean of Libraries.

At KU, the missions of the Libraries and of the IT department are very similar. Both strive to address the information needs of the university and in so doing, support the teaching, research, and outreach efforts of the KU community.”

The administrative body that oversees the Libraries, IT and also Networking Services at KU called Information Services. IS has the overriding goal of “guiding the University’s development and creative uses of information services and technology to help KU achieve its three-pronged mission of research, teaching and service.



Here is our current umbrella from the top down:

Information Services is over Information Technology and the Libraries

Digital Initiatives is a program of the Libraries and IT and DI staff includes librarians and technologists from both departments.

The DI program is a visible example of the cooperative efforts of the Information Services division.

Through internal collaboration,  
a project was completed  
and a successful, ongoing  
program was created.



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This is the issue statement for the project we'll be talking about today and for many of the projects undertaken by DI.

Our goal is to move from project to program by collaborating with many units in the Information Services Division of the university.

The technical aspects of our projects are addressed by systems and technology staff from the Libraries and IT. Processing and content issues are addressed by bibliographers, catalogers and processing staff and

A large amount of production work is carried out by student assistants.



## Association of Research Libraries Exposing Hidden Collections



September 8-9, 2003  
Library of Congress  
Washington DC

Conference Summary

Hidden Collections Conferees  
Call for Local and Collective Actions



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**The Kenneth Spencer Research Library, KU's library for archival, rare book, and manuscript collections, was involved in national efforts to improve access to library special collections. This effort, spearheaded by the Association of Research Libraries and the Library of Congress, was called "Exposing Hidden Collections."** The ARL Special Collections Task Force held "a working conference to explore the challenges of providing access to uncataloged and unprocessed archival, manuscript, and rare book materials" in September 2003. **The ARL task force report included the following recommendations:**

## Selected ARL Task Force Recommendations

- Hidden materials need to be processed and described so they can be used.
- Follow national standards and guidelines for all cataloging, arrangement, and description.



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**Hidden materials need to be processed and described so they can be used.**

**Follow national standards and guidelines for all cataloging, arrangement, and description.**

Strike a better balance between the resources committed to purchasing materials and accepting gifts and those resources committed to processing and cataloging them.



## Selected ARL Task Force Recommendations

- Develop different workflows for materials in various states of processing.
- Identify new technologies that might facilitate implementation of the recommendations.



**Weigh carefully the balance between the level of processing and cataloging an item and the impact on public service staff. Materials that are described are more easily findable, and thus usable, by local and remote users.**

Encourage inter-institutional cooperation.

**Develop different workflows for materials in various states of processing.**

**Identify new technologies that might facilitate implementation of the recommendations.**

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS LIBRARIES  
**KENNETH SPENCER RESEARCH LIBRARY**



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SRL recognized the need to promote its collections by providing consistent access to its holdings and basic description for unprocessed collections. Unprocessed or under-processed collections are hidden from the public, but “exposing” them has implications for staffing and workflow. Whereas special collections work was somewhat independent work in the past, it now would require adoption of standard procedures and more cooperation across the organization because of the new technologies that standards would require. Encoded Archival Description, or EAD Document Type Definition (DTD), is a standard for encoding archival finding aids using Extensible Markup Language (XML). EAD is a non-proprietary *de facto* standard for the encoding of finding aids for use in a networked (online) environment.

Finding aids are inventories of items in a collection, or guides, that are created by archival and manuscript repositories to provide information about specific collections. While the finding aids may vary somewhat in style, their common purpose is to provide detailed description of the content and intellectual organization of collections of archival materials. EAD allows the standardization of collection information in finding aids within and across repositories. This standardization aids users in interpreting descriptive information about special collections across institutions. XML allows for standard searches across finding aids (for example, to search within elements).

## EAD Proposal

- Need – to improve access to KSRL collections for local and distance users
- Problem – lack of access to finding aids to adequately promote KSRL collections, on and off campus



Proposal: Digital Initiatives would assume responsibility for conversion of existing finding aids into EAD format.

DI would also be responsible for project management (work done on schedule, within a set budget, with DI staff and students)

Would coordinate storage, delivery of finding aids via the Web

Develop tools, workflow, and training for Spencer Research Library technical processing

## EAD Proposal

- **Solution** – digitize new and existing finding aids according to accepted standards and best practices (EAD implementation).  
Make them available to distance users via the Internet and the library catalog
- **Stakeholders** -  
Collection Curators  
Processors  
Student Assistants



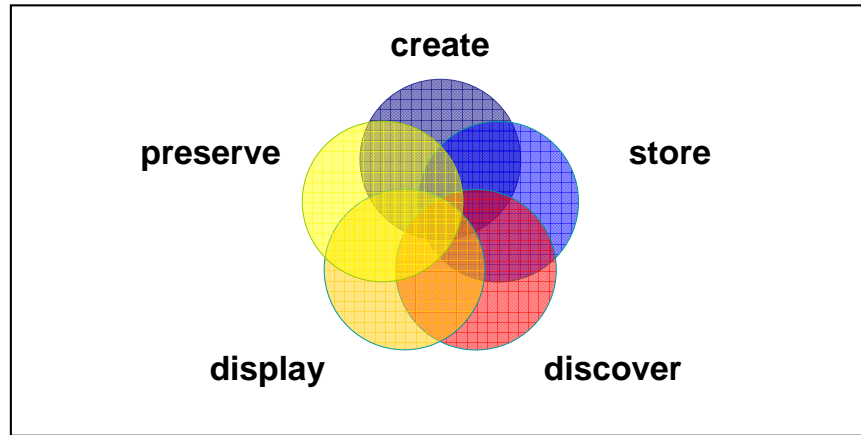
SRL staff had initial doubts about the need for adopting any descriptive and structural standards for archival and special collections. Special collections are inherently unique, and processing staff have to make decisions about what aspects of a collection to highlight in archival finding aids and indexes.

Furthermore, adoption of EAD would necessarily bring technology changes to the organization, and this raised concerns of processing staff, too. While technology adoption was not the driving force for change, it did become necessary that staff change their work habits as they adopted new software for encoding finding aids – in order to expose the previously hidden collections. **Importantly, making collections known and accessible was the driving force for change.**

**Technology was necessary for creating, displaying, searching, storing, and preserving the finding aids (and other scholarly information). DI's role was to design and implement the digital services needed to facilitate improved access.**

goal wasn't to change work processes or adopt technology but to aid access (result was both altered work practices and improved access)

## Digital Initiatives



Because of the DI goal, “to make scholarly information accessible in a digital format,” we were quickly identified to oversee the collaboration necessary to convert and create electronic finding aids. Our responsibilities included identifying the staff throughout the Libraries and IT needed to bring the project to fruition.

This diagram illustrates the multiple components of a digital project and how these components overlap to form an end product:

**Create** – In the case of finding aid creation and conversion, curatorial staff were responsible for the selection of materials and DI staff partnered with them to develop procedures for creating digital files.

**Store** – IT technicians located storage and server space.

**Discover** – Web services staff and librarians and DI staff worked together to find the most effective way to search and browse the finding aids, making them easily discovered by users.

**Display** – Special Collections curators and DI staff worked closely to design the style sheets which would define the look and feel and accuracy of the finding aid online display.

**Preserve** – DI staff recommended preservation file formats and file naming conventions and IT staff now provide maintenance and backups to the files stored on university servers.

# Collaboration is

# ...critical



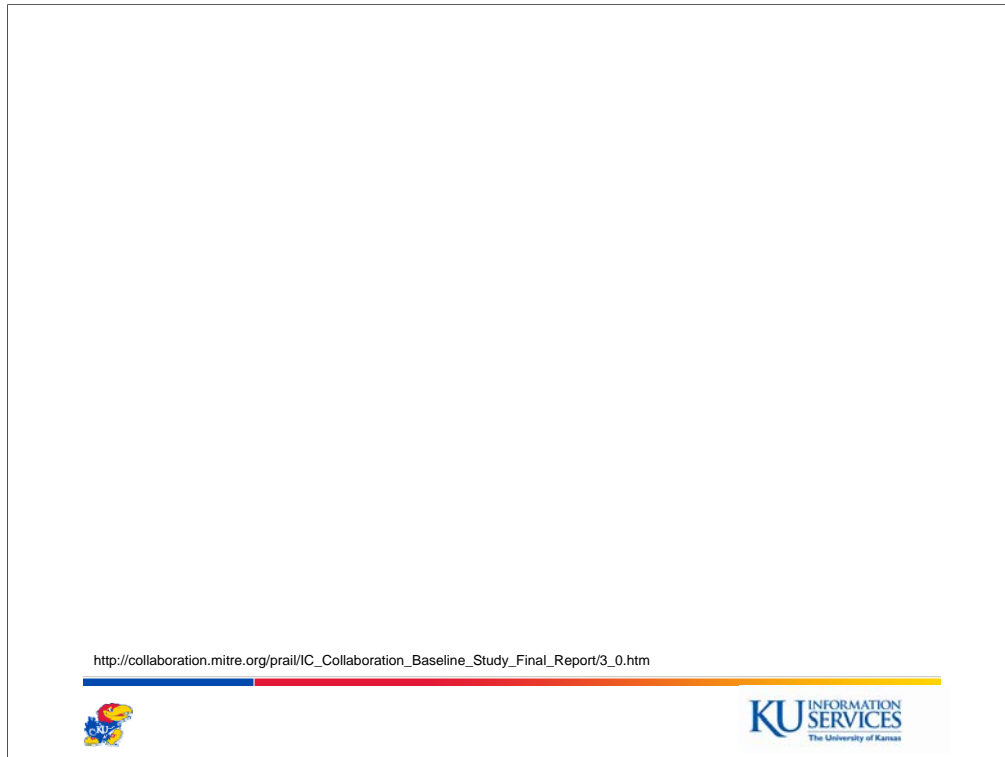
As you can start to see, collaboration and partnering is key to making our program work. There are a lot of jobs that require many skills and no one person can take on all of the tasks.

This picture describes our situation pretty clearly. If you consider the people providing the support the collaborating DI partners, you see a lot of people working together to provide a good solid base.

The person falling is the risk taker – the faculty member or bibliographer ready to convert material from a familiar format into a new, in many cases, untried digital format.

That person has to trust us to listen to him/her and provide the services needed.

We need to be sure we're offering effective, proven services so that potential partners continue to bring us their projects. We must be sure that no issues or concerns fall through the cracks.



This diagram gives another way of thinking about collaboration. This is called the *Culture of Sharing* and it shows the elements of a successful collaboration in the form of a jigsaw puzzle – with all the pieces working together to make a whole. We'll be discussing several of these elements further in the presentation but I'll read through them now:

Common Goal

Process and Workflow

Trust

Management support

Mutual Benefit

Rules of Engagement

Training

Critical Mass

Team Rewards

# Determine the Common Goal



Common Goal was agreed upon at the outset:

Broadly: expose hidden collections

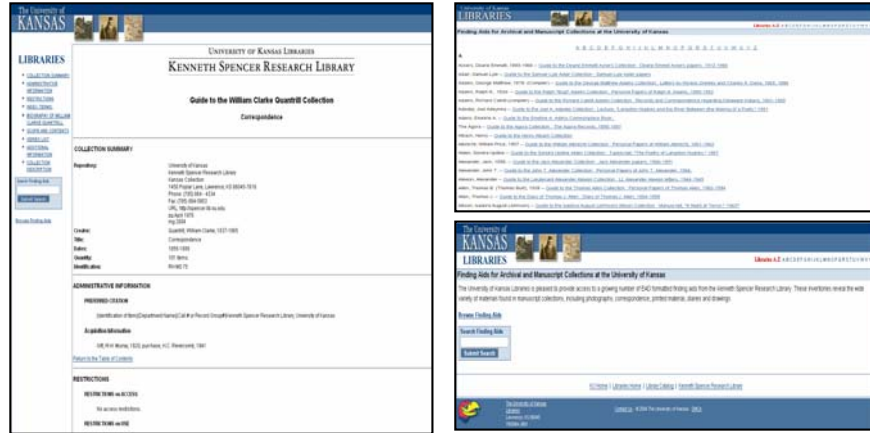
Specifically: encode existing or “legacy” finding aids and establish process to create new finding aids using EAD.

There was general acceptance of the process to be followed (rules of engagement).

The project had the support of Information Services leadership, and without this the project would not have been successful.



# Increase Visibility of Collections



Here is the common goal, stated again.

These are images of a finding aid, and two methods of access (keyword search and alphabetical browse by collection)

## Build Trust Among Team Members



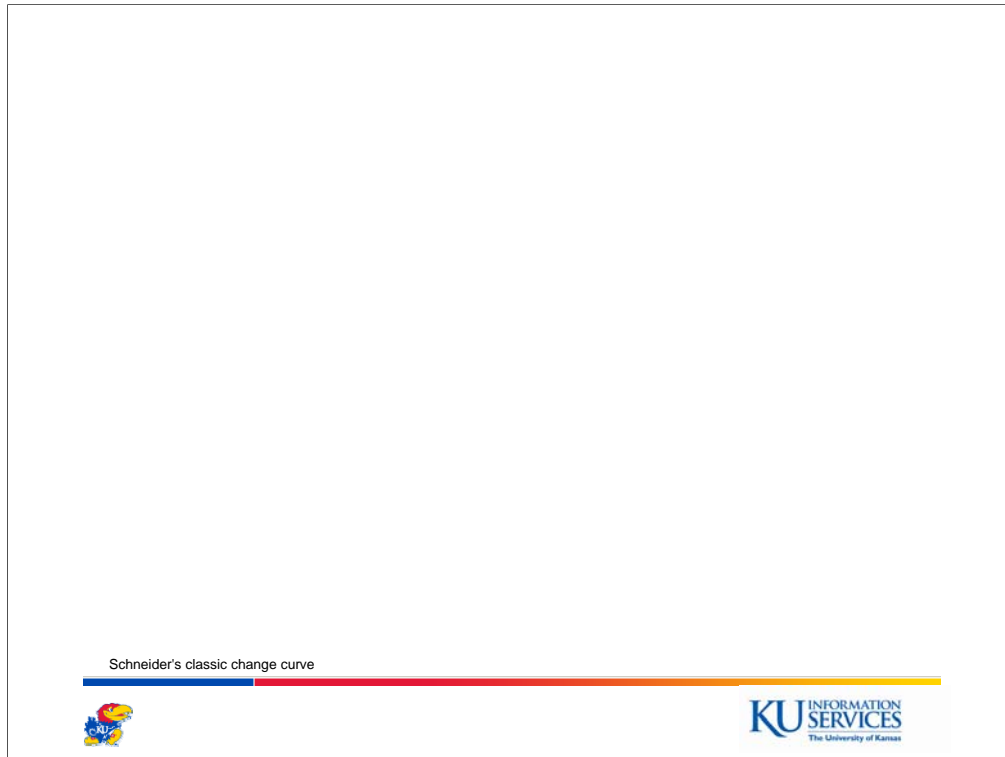
Building trust between partners is an essential piece of the collaboration puzzle. In this picture you see a lion and a tiny jackal – unexpected partners but, unless it's photoshopped, they seem to have a mutual respect.

In our finding aid project, as is true in any collaborative project, partners enter the project with a shared goal but had different agendas.

In our case, we planned to introduce a text encoding process, knowing it would simplify the cataloging process and provide a straight-forward means to improving collection access.

Our curators and processors involved saw it very differently. They knew that their traditional cataloging processes were neither simple or straightforward nor were they consistent.

To return to our common goal, we had to learn to trust each other and that meant we had to learn about and understand each other's agenda. We had to listen, ask questions, offer suggestions that showed we were paying attention.



We had support for the project at the highest levels of the IS organization, but the processors – the people in the trenches doing the work of describing archival and manuscript collections – required more convincing. They **wanted** the collections to be more accessible, but the changes produced (understandably) some anxiety.

This change curve shows the emotional reaction to change as it relates to performance over time.

There may be unrealistic expectations in the beginning, and you have to temper those, because once the realization of what the change actually means or what it will require to be success sets in, there will be feelings of despair.

No degree of planning or building trust will counter all negative feelings, but managing expectations from the outset is crucial.

We wanted to maintain a “steady state” to the extent we could, to avoid extreme highs and lows.

We did this in part by doing the initial finding aids conversion to create a critical mass of finding aids, and by working with staff in Spencer Library to create and document a processing workflow, and also training materials and instruction. Sarah will discuss the training aspect later.

## Process and Workflow

### Color Codes:

Work performed by  
processors

Work performed by  
reviewer (Schulle)

Work performed by  
cataloger



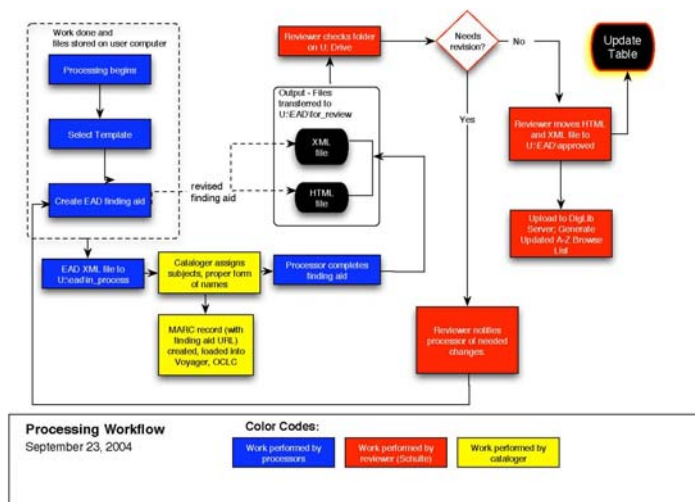
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Spencer Research Library comprises 3 departments: special collections, the Kansas collection, and university archives. Before work to implement the Exposing Hidden Collections recommendations, each department had its own manuscript processors and catalogers.

This was changing about the time of the EAD project, in part because of the emphasis on exposing hidden collections (streamlining operations, increasing productivity) . While not a result of the EAD project, it is important to note because there were many changes to work patterns during this time. The workflow we developed for Spencer Research Library has gone through several revisions to create efficient work processes, and still continues.

At times we were truly “the blind leading the blind” – we had to understand the work Spencer Library needed to accomplish, how that work was currently being done, and how new ways of working would change the organization. The workflow has been successful because it was a team effort, created collaboratively with those who would do the work.

# Process and Workflow



I'll not walk through every step of the workflow, but just point out that there were many steps, different people performing tasks, and decisions to be made that would determine the next step in the workflow.

This diagram was included in the documentation and training materials we produced. Sarah will talk about that now.

# Training and Consultation



Training was a crucial set in integrating the creation of EAD finding aids into the Library's processing workflow. We provided multiple instructional opportunities for staff. These included two four-hour hands-on workshops where staff and student processors were able to work directly with the software.

At the workshops, we gave each attendant a handbook which included a glossary, detailed instructions, annotated templates and contact information. The workshops were a good opportunity to work together and ask questions. It was particularly helpful to have the student assistants involved in the training because of their ability to quickly grasp the procedures and learn the software.

# Production and Consultation



After the initial hands-on training workshops, we made ourselves available to processors for one-on-one instruction. Our goal was to assist them as they began working in the EAD format and answer their questions as they came up.

These deskside consultation sessions, along with monthly group question and answer sessions, proved to be a valuable service for several weeks.

Fairly quickly, however, processors began to work cooperatively and came to rely on their own expertise when tackling issues with the EAD format or content accuracy.

Through **internal collaboration**, we successfully **completed a project** and helped **establish an ongoing program**.



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#### Importance/relevance

Collaborative effort – worked across reporting lines, colleague to colleague rather than up and down the org charts (but with support from management)

The project integrated into existing organizational structure -- A success when SRL assumes operations and it became a program

DI as “outsiders” or consultants jumpstarted the project

Need for cooperation at local and “global” level (EAD as globally accepted standard)

Effective cooperation and collaboration helped us reach the goal of making KU’s archival and manuscript collections more accessible: training, building trust so projects move forward important in all Digital Initiatives



# Benefits and Outcomes



As a result of the EAD project:

- Staff (eventually) embraced a new way of doing work– enthusiastic adopters of the technology

- 1500 finding aids converted; 2000 to date

- “instant” access to critical mass

- New position in special collections/archives

- Work integrated into internal processes and work

- DI – occasional consultants, but no hand in daily operations

- a program of SRL not DI

# So, is our work finished??



I think it is fair to say that all the partners who worked on this project felt like these women look at times during the process.

The good news is, yes, the work did finish – if you consider the initial project the toughest work. The program continues on and it certainly requires work and a growing expertise.

Members of the DI staff continue to offer occasional consultation and work continues on finding more sophisticated methods to search and retrieve information in the finding aids.

However, with the procedures and systems now in place and contacts and a solid network identified and accessible, this program is now running smoothly and our DI team has been able to turn its collective attention to new projects.

## Resources

- KU Digital Initiatives  
<http://kudiglib.ku.edu/>
- Finding Aids for Archival and Manuscript Collections at KU  
<http://ead.diglib.ku.edu/>
- Holly Mercer  
[hmerc@ku.edu](mailto:hmerc@ku.edu)
- Sarah Goodwin Thiel  
[sgthiel@ku.edu](mailto:sgthiel@ku.edu)

